

Jesse Bethel High School

2003-2004 Grand Jury Report

I. Reason for visitation

The Grand Jury elected to visit a random selection of schools in the County.

II. Procedure

The Grand Jury:

- Toured the school facility
- Talked with administrators, teachers, classified personnel and students
- Observed students in classes and moving from class-to-class
- Observed library, Transition Center, cafeteria, gymnasiums and classrooms

III. Background

1. Jesse Bethel High School is located at 1800 Ascot Parkway, Vallejo and is part of the Vallejo City Unified School District (VCUSD). It is the district's first high school built in 100 years. The school opened in September of 1998 initially with 9th and 10th grades. Currently, the school teaches grades 9 - 12.

2. The campus design is a tiered style. There is a main level with two higher levels. The main level has the administration offices, library and classrooms. The second tier has additional classrooms along with the locker areas and the quad area. The third tier has a gymnasium, cafeteria and the vocational education classes. Due to the "open" campus design, the school is not secure. Vandalism is high during the non-school hours.

3. The original program was a block schedule with four classes per semester, at 90 minutes per class. There was an advisory period at the end of the day for 35 minutes with a maximum of 25 students per class. The school district discontinued the block program after two years. Major reasons cited for discontinuation were lack of teacher support and the cost. The Bethel community (parents, staff and students) has endured the changes well.

4. The current school program is a "traditional" schedule of six periods per day. The Academic Center, a carryover from the original program, is a tutoring center to help students with their class work. Under the old program, students did not fail classes but received an "I" or incomplete grade which was to be made up to a passing grade. Sixty percent of the affected students went from "I's" to passing grades. The remainder retained a failing grade.

5. At the time of this visitation, there were 1,480 students registered. The demographics of the school include 39% Black, 37% Filipino, 5% Hispanic, 5% non-Hispanic White, with a small percentage of Pacific Islander and other ethnic groups.

6. There are 60 teachers: 45 fully credentialed teachers and 15 with emergency credentials are in the process of becoming fully credentialed. There are nine Special Education teachers.

7. VCUSD is its own Special Education district unlike other school districts visited in the County.

8. The Principal has empowered students to participate in the decision making process during faculty and staff meetings because “the school is there to serve the students.”

IV. Findings and Recommendations

Each finding is referenced to the background paragraph number

Finding #1 – The school houses a Transition Center which serves all of Vallejo High Schools, Continuation and Middle Schools. This Center is primarily used by Special Education students and is federally funded; however, any student can use the career/placement facility. (2)

Recommendation #1 – The Grand Jury recommends continuation of this admirable program.

Finding #2 – The VCUSD uses the cafeteria as the main kitchen to prepare meals for all of the elementary schools in the district, along with the meals for Jesse Bethel High. The district does not use contracted food service. (2)

Recommendation #2 – The 2004-2005 Grand Jury review the cost-effectiveness of this system.

Finding #3 – Overall school maintenance is poor, considering the age of the school. At the time of the visit, the Grand Jury randomly inspected restroom facilities, drinking fountains (T2 building), locker areas (L4) and overall campus upkeep. A drinking fountain handle was not operable, and the bowl area was dirty but working. Many lockers were vandalized to the point of exposed sharp metal edges protruding into the walkway endangering the students and staff. (2)

Recommendation #3 – Damaged lockers need immediate attention. Drinking fountains need to be clean and operable at all times.

Finding #4 - Many maintenance problems are not addressed because of the deferred maintenance. (2)

Recommendation #4 - Re-evaluate the deferred maintenance policy.

Finding #5 - The Grand Jury observed that the ramps from level two to level three are very steep. Students in wheelchairs need assistance to use these ramps. Even with assistance, coming down the ramp could be hazardous if the assistant were to lose control. (2)(4)(6)(7)

Recommendation #5 - The School District and the Special Education Department should look into the feasibility of either changing the slope of the ramps, putting in a lift or devising a better access from level two to level three for students with ambulatory challenges.

IV. Comments

Better day-to-day campus upkeep needs to be established and enforced. A clean campus promotes school pride and better morale. A more secure campus would reduce the rate of vandalism and reduce maintenance costs. Deferred maintenance will only cost the District more in the long-run.

A teacher took the initiative to adapt a closet into a photography darkroom. The Grand Jury applauds this teacher for her creativity.

V. Affected Agencies

- Solano County Office of Education
- Vallejo City Unified School District
- Vallejo City Unified School Board
- Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA)
- Jesse Bethel High School